



King County

Ron Sims

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CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

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**Regional Governance (RG) Subcommittee
King County Charter Review Commission
Meeting Minutes – October 1, 2007
NCOB, 5:30pm-7:30pm**

The October 1, 2007 meeting of the Regional Governance Subcommittee of the King County Charter Review Commission was called to order by Chair Bryan Glynn at 5:40 p.m.

Commission members in attendance:

Bryan Glynn, Co-Chair
Doreen Cato, Co-Chair
Kirstin Haugen
John Jensen
Terry Lavender
Mike Lowry
Gary Long
Lois North
Mike Wilkins
James Williams

Absent:

Juan Bocanegra
Sharon Maeda

Staff:

Becky Spithill, Project Manager, Charter Review Commission
Corrie Watterson, Project Manager, Charter Review Commission
Mark Yango, Charter Review Coordinator

Guest:

Larry Phillips,, Councilmember, King County Council

Council and PAO Staff:

Ross Baker, Council Chief of Staff
Rebecha Cusack, Council Liaison to the Commission
Mike Sinsky, Senior Deputy Prosecuting Attorney, Prosecuting Attorney's Office
Nick Wagner, Council Co-Liaison to the Commission

Opening Remarks and Issue Assignment Discussion

Bryan Glynn asked for approval of minutes from the September 24, 2007 meeting; minutes were approved with one exception: Mike Wilkins wanted the minutes to reflect that in addressing issues related to Regional Committees, the subcommittee did not make recommendations as the minutes stated. He called for an amendment that would remove the word recommended. The minutes were adopted as amended.

1. Guest Speaker: King County Councilmember Larry Phillips: Regional Committees in the charter (Section 270) and a reduction in the size of Regional Committees.

Councilmember Phillips presented remarks to the subcommittee on the regional committees. A summary of his comments follows:

Metro merger discussions (late 1980s and early 1990s) and a subsequent court ruling established the unconstitutionality of Metro government. The council proactively put Metro Merger II on the ballot; a new form of government had to maintain regional functions that Metro had fulfilled. King County was transitioning from a local service provider to a regional government, in which case we needed a Regional Policy Committee, in addition to the original Metro Water Quality and Transit committees. It was approved by the voters and elected officials, but had a rocky start.

There were originally 13 members on the council, and the regional subcommittees were sized relative to the number of councilmembers. We've now downsized the council to nine members, and lost the participation of four of those members. In addition, with an emerging regional government function for King County, the demands on the council have expanded considerably. Councilmembers must serve on the Sound Transit Board, the Regional Transit Investment District Board and other regional committees and boards, including the Ferry and Flood Hazard Control districts.

Attendance of councilmembers at regional committee meetings has been spotty in the past and is likely to continue to be an issue in the future. This may be the time to go back to the voters and rethink the number of members on the regional committees.

My recommendation is to lower the required number of councilmembers on each regional committee from six to three, and the number of suburban cities representatives from six to three. A possible assignment of ½ votes might be necessary to allow for broader representation of suburban city members. Alternatively, the council can change the scheduling of the meetings to make it possible for members to attend more regional committee meetings, perhaps going to quarterly, all-day regional committee meetings.

2. Questions and Answers (paraphrased)

Mrs. North: Section 270.20 is extremely detailed to include suburban cities. It may be that the charter should be amended to use more general language to identify regional committees and their responsibilities, but perhaps should not detail the membership composition. It would be up to the Council to set up the details of regional committees in a companion ordinance. Having flexibility that the charter does not offer is important with changes in urban areas, and in

particular, the decline in population of Seattle. The commission could recommend to council that it pass an ordinance detailing the composition of the regional committees, but the recommendation would have to spell out ordinance elements so the voters would know have an accurate sense of what the ordinance would require.

Councilmember Phillips: This would provide the flexibility that the County needs to respond to changing demographics, etc. However, voters might have a tendency to vote no if there is uncertainty about what might be in the ordinance and if Council would pass it. The solution to that problem is to develop a proposed ordinance and have it vetted by stakeholders before it goes to the ballot.

Ms. Haugen: Has there been a formal discussion with the suburban cities about changes in the regional committees? What was their reaction?

Councilmember Phillips: No formal discussion has taken place, but informal discussions have occurred. Suburban cities' representatives are sympathetic but tentative about what might replace the existing composition of the regional committees. Thus far, there is no commitment that they would support a downsizing plan.

Mr. Long: Suburban Cities are very interested in this issue. With a diverse region, they want to ensure that all voices are heard. They would support a less than whole vote if it meant broader representation. How did the six/six composition get started?

Councilmember Phillips: Councilmembers were considered representative of the county, and it was a political decision to make the membership of regional committees half council and half suburban cities, et al.

Mr. Wilkins: Is there any discussion about the regional committees being allowed to select their own chair?

Councilmember Phillips: It hasn't come up much. The designation of a chair functions well as it is and, in fact, the RPC has a role in selecting its chair. Council would continue supporting a councilmember serving in the capacity as chair.

Ms. Cato: What is the Council's stance on 1/2 vote?

Councilmember Phillips: It is important to preserve the balance in place, while preserving and facilitating broader representation. This would be a discussion for the cities of Seattle and Bellevue, and not an issue about which Council would dictate.

Governor Lowry: A few questions remain to be answered. First, how do we pass a charter amendment on this issue when some people feel excluded? Second, how do we engage the suburban cities in order to mitigate potential opposition? And finally, how do we engage the city of Seattle?

Councilmember Phillips: It's best to begin with the Suburban Cities Association, as well as Bellevue and Seattle. We're confident that the mayor of Seattle will be receptive and supportive. The response of the Seattle City Council is an unknown, but it has traditionally valued its voting position. We are hoping that city council members will be receptive to some reform.

Mrs. North: Are you suggesting that we should engage SCA sooner rather than later? Does the Commission have a role?

Councilmember Phillips: Yes. The discussion should begin with the deliberations of the Commission.

Mrs. North: There is concern that the council is not responsive to the regional committees. Is it possible that the council could pass an ordinance that it take up regional committees' issues within a mandated timeframe (30 days)?

Councilmember Phillips: Regional committees have been heavily involved in water quality issues. Regional plans and policies are fair game. When committees take up operational or budget issues, these are not appropriate issues for regional committees to consider. This is under the purview of the council.

Mrs. North: Then this specification should be spelled out in ordinance. Regional policy and transit committees have not been as successful as the water quality committee. Should the charter language be changed to compel the council to respond to regional committees issues, provided the charter specifies that operational and budget issues are not to be considered?

Ms. Cato: What are the long-term implications if some reform doesn't come about?

Councilmember Phillips: This would force fewer meetings of longer duration.

[Mr. Glynn defers his role as chair to Ms. Cato]

Mr. Glynn: Can we do anything in the charter to ensure that committees do not bring to council budget/operational issues? How does the council respond to those issues?

Councilmember Phillips: Council will have to explain the purview of the committees and why such issues are not appropriate for committee recommendations. New membership requires a replay of the explanation again and again, so spelling this out in the charter would be helpful.

Mr. Glynn: Tribal representations are at issue? Should they be represented?

Councilmember Phillips: Water quality and transit have not received requests for tribal representation. I don't know about expanded representation. Outreach to tribes has occurred, but council has not gotten much response, although tribal staff has participated. Voting privilege is given to actual representatives, not staff.

[Mr. Glynn reassumes chair duties.]

3. Next Steps re: Regional Committees

It was agreed to invite Bellevue and the City of Seattle to subsequent meetings,, as well as Sonny Putter of the Suburban Cities Association and a representative of the Snoqualmie Tribe. It was noted that the level of interest for the Indian Nations will vary depending on the regional committee. The November 5 meeting will take up issues involving the regional committees.

4. King County Library System (KCLS) Discussion

Mr. Williams raised the issue of Ad Hoc members' targeted concerns about Executive Sims' decision to appoint the son of an outgoing trustee, as well as the members' charge that it smacks of nepotism and corruption. He asked whether there was a time and a place to consider the KCLS issues in greater detail.

Mr. Glynn said that the October 29th meeting will be devoted to the KCLS, with invitations going to stakeholder representatives, including KCLS trustees, the Ad Hoc group, and the Executive. Mrs. North said that we need Mr. Sinsky to provide the legal framework for the KCLS and what it is the subcommittee can do in the charter to address concerns that were expressed in the course of public hearings. Mr. Williams said that Mr. Sinsky has indicated that there is room in the charter for changing the way that trustees are appointed to the KCLS board, which strikes at the heart of citizen concerns. Mr. Sinsky agreed to provide an outline of the issues facing the KCLS.

5. Final notes

Ms. Cusack provided a summary of the letter from council to the commission co-chairs requesting the commission's consideration of the issue of appropriate financial policies and business practices. The recommendation is for an extended budget timeline greater than the current 45 days; this is in Article 4, Section 4.10 of the charter—the effective date is December 1 of each year. In addition, the system of allotments, which is stipulated in the charter, is an archaic system that should be eliminated.

Mr. Glynn opened the discussion for recommendations about consideration of these issues. Mr. Wilkins said that he anticipates tension between the council and the Executive about the budget timeline, while everyone will agree on the allotment system. Ms. Cusack suggested that the commission will need to identify a "compromise" timeline. The subcommittee agreed that the allotment system issue would be taken up by the group dealing with orphan/technical issues, while the budget issues would require more careful consideration. Governor Lowry recommended adopting the state timeline (~135 days).

Meeting was adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Next meeting: Monday, October 29, 2007.

Respectfully submitted by Becky Spithill